

Art Tales

A Writing Contest Inspired by Art

2016 Awards



Historically
STORIED



Marquette Hardeman



Paula Odor



Meredith Brooks Abbott



Katherine McGuire

CITY OF
VENTURA
PARKS, RECREATION &
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Eighth Annual

Art Tales

**A Writing Contest
Inspired by Art**

The City of Ventura is pleased to sponsor, in partnership with E.P. Foster Library, a creative contest for local writers. The competition invites writers to submit an original short story or poem that was inspired by one of the Municipal Art Collection works of art currently on exhibit on the second floor of the E.P. Foster Library in downtown Ventura.

In an effort to make the City's art collection more accessible to the community, the City of Ventura joined with E.P. Foster Library to provide an exhibit space for a limited number of works, which are rotated annually. Each piece in this year's assortment of artwork challenges the viewer to puzzle over the work's meaning and provides an excellent opportunity for students and adults alike to exhibit their written skills while learning about viewing works of art. This contest is a call for imaginative and inventive people to examine a work of art and then write a short story or poem reflecting their unique interpretation.

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Cat's Point of View

by Giabella Thompson

I am a humble black cat,
eating meat and chasing vermin.
But, I do more things than that.
Once in a while, I listen to my mistress' conversations.
On a daily basis I run from the dirty, brown, hound that eats like the steer we house.
I fight for respect with the young, white, disrespectful, flea-bitten mongrel that calls itself a regal cat.
When we have our weekly fight, we smash into pots.
Meanwhile, our mistress talks with the other Ranchero exchanging goods.
The hot sun comes up and warms the speckled hide of cows with bright, yellow, rays.
The sky is as blue as dyed thread, yet the skinny, milky clouds are wooly and white.
Another day at Ortega Adobe from a cat's point of view.

Inspired by Ortega Adobe, by Marguerite Hardeman, c. 1960s, oil on canvas, 31" x 37"



The Whistle

by Rachel Patrykus

In the dusty and hot afternoon
I heard someone whistle a tune
It rang sweet and clear through the air
It was made by a free man who hadn't a care
I rushed to the window curious to see
Who the visitor could be

A man walked down the track toward our house
Past the flowers and the peppers hanging up to dry
He took off his hat as the porch made the rays douse
He knocked on the door and finished his tune with a cry
"What a beautiful day!"

Inspired by Ortega Adobe, by Marguerite Hardeman, c. 1960s, oil on canvas, 31" x 37"



Thrift Stores

by Jack Gordon

Thrift stores,
The toys,
The old clothes,
Helps people in need,
The old antiques,
The old antiques,
The spirit,
The hope,
The smell of the crisp money,
It's like a bank,
Those doors of hope,
It's a new beginning,
Those registers ringing,
The retailing,
People rushin' through the doors,
The anger,
The sadness,
Too much despair,
The generation,
The hundreds of stories within all those ancient items,
Waiting to be unfolded,
To make a revolution.

Inspired by Thrift, by Paula Odor, 1999, watercolor, 34" x 28"

The Story of an Orange Tree

by Kaley Pera

Once upon a time...a small seed was planted on a tall hill. Every day the farmer would water the seed and make sure it had plenty of sunlight. When the seed sprouted and finally saw the sky, and a small breeze blew through its tiny leaves, the now small plant saw many other trees. It saw Apple trees, and Strawberry bushes, even Cherry blossom trees. The seed soon grew into a beautiful Orange tree. It had bright green leaves, a very light brown trunk and branches.

The tree wished very much for a friend. Every day it would watch as hundreds of strawberries sang to each other and swayed in the field with each other. It saw the apples talking to each other about all the beautiful butterflies they saw that day. Even the cherry blossom tree's little buds talked about the small bees that came to visit them every day.

One day in late spring a small little flower bud grew on one of the trees branches. It was white and very pretty. After a few weeks, it bloomed into a beautiful flower. The small flower was very interested in everything the tree had to tell. The tree told the small flower of all it had seen. The tree told the little flower of winter and summer and fall. The flower wished it could see the fields and other trees, but because it was hidden by the leaves, it could only see its friend the tree.

After a few days more and more buds came. They all talked to each other and to the small flower. All the flower's center began to take the shape of a circle, they shed their beautiful petals



Meredith Brooks Abbott

and, after a few days, they turned into oranges.

The tree's friend could now see a small bit of the fields because it was bigger. It could see the beautiful cherry blossom trees and could hear the strawberries sing much sweeter.

Sadly all good things must come to an end. One day the farmer came back and collected the oranges. The little orange was taken off the branch it hung from and was taken back down the hill in a box with its other orange friends, but the tree stayed.

Small sap tears ran down the tree's branches.

After many days, a small bird came to rest on one of the tree's branches. The bird was bright blue and had a white belly. It landed softly on the trees branch. The bird set a small seed on the ground next to the tree.

The seed sprouted into a small plant, just as the orange tree had. After some time, the small plant grew into a beautiful orange tree. The newest tree spoke to the Elder one, and told it of the many adventures it had of, being sold at the market as an orange, eaten by a bird and taken as a seed here, back to its old friend.

Inspired by Oranges Against Shadows, by Meredith Brooks Abbott, 1999, oil on canvas, 21" x 25"

Renewal

by Nadia Connelly

A seed forgotten in a vast forest grove grew into a marvelous orange tree that rose from the dust like a phoenix from ashes. Every soul in the woodland village had tasted the tree's delectable oranges, but not all things can be as sweet as they appear.

"How beautiful I look," said the orange tree to anyone who would listen. "My fruit is sweeter than the clearest spring, or the loveliest nightingale's song."

An old woman traveling through the sunlit grove stopped and smiled, "Indeed, your golden fruit and deep green leaves are pure and beautiful."

The orange tree replied, "If only I could say the same about you."

The old woman's tan wrinkled skin and silver hair showed immense age, but her eyes were intelligent and years of wisdom were stored beneath their pale blue depths.

Still she smiled and said, "Although I may not look as stunning as you, I will leave this world a wise woman and you will die with nothing but your ruined beauty and nothing to pass on to others."

She turned saying, "Beauty only lasts so long, while wisdom may last an eternity." Leaving the tree, she turned on her heel, and the grove fell silent.

Thinking nothing of the old woman's wisdom, the tree resumed calling to travelers and gazing at its reflection in a silver stream.



Many generations of oranges had fallen, and the tree grew gnarled. It had been a long time since its fruit had been eaten, for years of conceit had flowed into the roots souring the oranges.

"Alas," said the tree when its life was near an end, "I have spent my whole life priding my beauty and now in my dying days I have just learned that even the sweetest looking thing cannot be called sweet if its heart is bitter and cold."

From the heart of the forest, from the silent tranquility of the grove, the old woman appeared from an early morning mist. Leaning heavily on a walking stick, looking older than before, the old woman looked at the grove she had left so long ago. Spying the tree, she sighed, age had caught up to it. Kneeling she unearthed from the forgotten fruit a small sprout.

Turning to the tree she spoke, "Like the moon you will wane, but your lesson will always leave a trace. Remember, no life will live forever, and therefore, should be lived with purpose."

The tree, too weak to utter a sound, withered. Its last look at the world was the sprout, reaching out of the dust, like a phoenix from the ashes of a lesson well learned.

Inspired by Oranges Against Shadows, by Meredith Brooks Abbott, 1999, oil on canvas, 21" x 25"



Katherine McGuire

The Two Trees

by Emily Replogle

Once there was a litter of puppy sheep dogs and they lived on a farm. Two dogs out of that litter were named Steve and Dixie. They stayed together everywhere they went. One day they were adopted and were separated. They were so sad they whined all day every day. As they got older, their love grew colder. They forgot about each other just like that.

But one day their different owners decided to take their dogs, Steve and Dixie, to the park. They happened to go on the same day. The two dogs saw one another and instantly they remembered each other. They also figured out they lived right around the corner from each other.

So every day they would see each other and their owners became friends. But after many years Steve and Dixie died. Their owners buried them in graves on top of the hill. One night there was a BIG storm. Rain and thunder happened and a lot of trees and houses were soaked in water. There were many mud slides.

After all of that the owners came up to check on the dogs' graves and what they saw would blow your mind. They saw two sprouts exactly where the dogs were buried and after several months the two sprouts became two trees. And now they sit there over the town watching everyone. So even though Steve and Dixie died, their love never will.

Inspired by Catalina Street V, by Katherine McGuire, 2002, watercolor on paper, 22" x 28"

The Porch

by Katelynn McDonald

My hands harshly scrubbed at the bowl,
And stung in the soapy water.
They were skinned to the point of bleeding,
But that was a pain I didn't feel.
That was a pain that didn't hurt.

Knock knock,
The sound was wretched in my ears.
It put blue thoughts in my hollow mind,
And filled me with dread.
My raw hands set down the freshly cleaned dishes.

My feet carried me to the door.
I touched the rusted doorknob, pulling slowly,
The door opened with a shriek.
It sounded as though it didn't want to be opened,
And I didn't want to open it.

Standing on the porch was a man,
A man I could no longer recognize.
He stared down at the cracked tiles of the porch,
His face etched with regret and sadness,
That had changed him completely.

To my left stood my sister,
Staring through the window with blank eyes.
She knew what was to come,
We all had indeed known.
And now, it was real.

The sky was beautiful,
Just a few clouds mixed-in with blue.
Birds flew freely in it,
I wished to be one myself.



Cool gusts blew through the door,
Hitting my face and moving my hair.
It blew through wind chimes,
Ruffled papers and napkins on the table.

Our dogs came to the door,
Sniffing at the man's feet.
Their eyes wondered around the man,
And back at me in curiosity,
For they couldn't find the person they looked for.

I looked to the man,
Who stood with his hat on his chest.
His eyes filled with tears,
And as I stared into them,
I didn't want to ask.

My eyes and throat burned,
As tears welled up and blinded my sight.
I squeezed my eyes and sighed,
Before releasing them.
I opened my mouth.

"Where is she?" I asked,
But I knew.
My father looked at me through heavy eyelids,
And heaved a heavy breath of air and said,
"Your mother is gone."

Inspired by Ortega Adobe, by Marguerite Hardeman, c. 1960s, oil on canvas, 31" x 37"

Second Place: Teen Poetry



Orange

by Elizabeth Salinas

Orange makes me happy
It is bright and calm and warm
Fire, flowers, fruit

I see it around
The oranges in the orchard
In the yards and fields

Orange makes me happy
Its smell reminds me of life
The sweet, the sour

Oranges share culture
The work of my father's hands
The food made by mom

Every juicy bite
And every whiff of its tang
Reminds me to say

Thank you for the orange
The care of color and taste
My parent's love, work

Inspired by Oranges Against Shadows, by Meredith Brooks Abbott, 1999, oil on canvas, 21" x 25"

Ventura's Sentinels

by Cianna Calia

Last week I took a peaceful walk
Down Catalina Street
And passed a strolling couple who
Were quite along in years.
I briefly heard the two converse
In tones as smooth and sweet
As morning songbirds' serenades,
Or airborne melodies.
And over rhythmic stepping sounds
Made by three pairs of feet,
Their voices traveled to me,
Floating softly on the breeze.

The man said he was glad the day
Was beautiful and clear,
To which his wife responded with
A question that I missed.
The words he gave in answer were
The last that I could hear:
"My dear, they've stood through rain and fire,
Through harmony and strife;
To see them in the distance is
To know that home is near.



Katherine McGuire

Those proud and timeless sentinels
Have watched me all my life."

"What enigmatic words!" I thought,
Perplexed, bewildered, thrown,
But at the time I carried on
And pushed them from my mind.
I told myself I had no time
For mysteries not my own,
And yet the old man's words came back
To taunt me in my sleep,
Until the echoes in my head
Had so consuming grown,
I swore to find those sentinels,
My sanity to keep!

I eagerly began my search
On Main Street the next day.
I briskly walked through mellow crowds,
My eyes on keen patrol.

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—continued from page 11

I passed antique shops, galleries,
A quaint, old-style café;
At last I paused before the stately
Mission by the Sea.
“Some sentinel is this!” said I,
But then to my dismay,
My heart declared I was not done;
It simply could not be.

With fresh determination I
Walked back the way I came,
And then drove up to City Hall
In search of better luck.
On a familiar plaque I spotted
Father Serra’s name.
“Some sentinel is he!” I cried,
And thought my search was done,
As I beheld his smooth bronze face
And proud, unyielding frame.
Then I recalled that the old man
Had meant more than just one.

So solitary Serra could
Not be the answer sought.
That night again the old man’s words
Played over in my dreams.
I rose before the sun next morn

And set off at a trot
To take a hike up to the Cross
To get a better view.
“Now here is yet another lonely
Sentinel,” I thought
As I admired its weathered wood,
Now soft with morning dew.

Perhaps I did not need to find
The old man’s sentinels.
Throughout the City of Good Fortune,
I’d found my own anew:
The citrus groves, the golden hills,
The Cross, the mission bells,
The islands touched by fluid light,
And Father Serra too.

I later took another stroll
Down Catalina Street
And finally saw an answer that
Was beautiful and clear:
Two Trees have stood through rain and fire,
Through harmony and strife;
To see them in the distance is
To know that home is near.
These proud and timeless sentinels
Have watched me all my life.

Inspired by Catalina Street V, by Katherine McGuire, 2002, watercolor on paper, 22" x 28"

Jackets

by Olivia Loorz

She was born on the left. In blue. Her childhood dreams were rounded sailor dreams. Laundry baskets and a broken hammock were her vessel and sail. The ocean was an indescribable gap between reality and ambition. She sailed in naive wonderment. 'Become a whale,' say she, and so she would sing the lonesome echoed call and do so. 'Have no fear,' say she, and so she would step up higher and higher. And as she did, her fingertips became lighter and lighter with childhood prosperity.

She came upon adolescence rather ungracefully, like a car turning too hard and ending up clunking onto the curb of some stranger's house. She became afraid of sharks when she saw a dark man in an office supply store with only one arm. All at once she saw the dangers of the ocean and how immensely they overpower the wonder of it. The born blue began to fade from her. Instead of becoming a vessel, laundry baskets held piles of stinking thin fabrics such as she was. She offered herself no protection as she grew less and less wary of vulnerability. When she dragged her fingernails over her skin, she felt the gaunt threads of her being.

When she was 17, her young brother was hit by a train. He was in surgery for 6 hours before being greeted with the fluorescent sound of his own death. She remembers thinking that no one should have to hear the beat of their own heart cease. All her worries and joys collided into a shapeless and nondescript being. Death turned her into a thick dark mass. She boiled around her

house during the day and at night, she drove down freeways with all the windows down so she could hear nothing but howling wind.

She enrolled in medical school. After two months, she dropped out. One week later, she re-enrolled, driven by the incessant noise of beeping hearts and train whistles and whooshing air and -somewhere distant- waves. But then, incessant words of people and textbooks got caught in her starched lab coat threads, drowning her, and she dropped out again. This time, it was almost a year before she returned. There were times when she felt too saturated to stay, but finishing meant that she still had power over her where her life hung and so she completed med school, but she was never able to once again don the white coat.

She moved to the sloping, dry landscape of the desert. Here she felt as if her threads could finally settle into her bones. Her life was plain and neutral, and she was content. She spent days watching the plants grow. The plants who had to dig deep to find water and hold their ground amongst the shifting sand. The sun beat heavily as she felt defined shadows fall on her. Shadows of beeping trains and her brother. Of vessel laundry baskets and the ocean. Here she hangs in beating rays, on the right.



Paula Odor

The Door Swings

by Rachel Chang

1936: The door swings open. One small sandal steps in. It hovers there, testing for danger. Content, the second sandal follows. A young boy wanders in. His eyes, watery with fear, gaze the room. Before him is a cove of - sweaters, picture frames, lamps, teddy bears, some of those pretty trinkets that he finds in his mother's jewelry box, and even a tricycle. The room is scattered with random knickknacks and whatnots. This place is so peculiar, where is he? Something occurs in his 4 year old mind. He gasps with understanding. He is in a cave, a dragon's cave, and all these gadgets aren't just any gadgets, they're robbed treasures. He hears something stir behind him. Exhilarated, he frantically prepares to play hero. His heart pounds faster as the beast lurks closer. Suddenly, something grabs his shoulders. "There you are, Oliver! I've been looking everywhere for you!" A 4 year old boy and his mother walk out.

1949: The door swings open. A pair of tattered sneakers enter and stride with haste towards the cashier desk. A 17 year old boy grabs a t-shirt from under the desk and pulls it over his head. The t-shirt reads "San Buenaventura Thrift Store Employee." He pins on his name badge, which reads "Oliver." Then he begins his routine. He impassively strolls through the aisles, only thinking of the unopened textbooks waiting for him at home. Home. He sighs. He sees a shirt that has slipped onto the floor and warily returns it back onto its hanger. There is a series of shrill snickers behind him. He slowly turns to face a group of his school mates. He continues to

work. They squawk again. Suddenly, there is a clamor of shattering glass. He turns to see broken shards littering the floor. "Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry," one of them pipes, her voice sounding droll and ingenuine. They scurry out to their next social entertainment. For another two hours, he cleans and sorts. When the clock finally dismisses him, he collects his paycheck. A 17 year old teenager walks out.

1958: The door swings open. Several pairs of boots stomp in. A group of post-graduates carry in a sofa. They set it down in the corner, along with other donated household items. They turn to the benefactor and ask, "Is that the last of it?" He nods. The roommates suddenly come close and hug their departing friend. "We'll miss you, Oliver. Once you get settled in Finland and start your new life, be sure to come back to Ventura and visit us." He says goodbye one last time. A 26 year old young man walks out.

2016: The door swings open. A pair of black loafers and a cane stagger in. A man of 83, no 84, gawks at his surroundings. Oliver wipes his spectacles in disbelief. So much has changed in the San Buenaventura Thrift Store. An 84 year old man walks out. The door swings shut.



Paula Odor

The Coat

by Kailey Garcia

A white coat hung solemnly in the window. She noticed it as she passed by on that warm, sunny, summer day. She thought about it only briefly, why should she spend any more time than a second or two. After all it was just in an old coat sitting solemnly in the thrift store window.

She kept walking. As she did she escaped all thought of that bastard coat. The wind began to bellow as she continued down the pavement away from the store. How odd, she thought to herself, after all it was the dead center of summer and the warm sun was tanning her skin. Even so the wind had decided that it wasn't summer. The wind had decided that it was a cold winter day, and although there wasn't a cloud in the sky a storm was to be had.

The gusting wind shook the palm trees and blew dust this way and that way. The girl was not happy. Now her hair was messed up and she was cold. She had no choice, she had to go inside the grave little thrift shop.

There was a ding from the bell as she entered. The old women working looked up and smiled joyfully at the young girl whom the wind had brought in. They didn't get many young people in their little shop.

The girl looked around perturbed by all of the old garments and worn out, run down wardrobe. Everything felt old and dirty to the touch, she wished she still kept hand sanitizer in her small purse.

The store was filled with granny style cardigans, and wacky old dress shoes. None of

which suited her fancy. She was going to leave and brave the cold winds of that summer day, but then she saw it.

The white coat hung solemnly in the window. For no reason apparent to her in the slightest, she pulled it off the rack and put it on.

It fit perfectly. She waltzed over to the mirror and took a look at that solemn coat and suddenly she realized it wasn't solemn at all. That coat was a marvelous little thing it reminded her of old black and white movies, the ones with singing and romantic scenes in the rain. That coat reminded her of every beautiful winter day and movie stars with thick black sunglasses.

With that in mind she saw the thrift store again with new eyes. It wasn't grave and dirty, it was life anew. The clothes weren't old and sad they were special worn in and waiting for someone to come and bring the life back to them. Everything in there was starting over and got to be different then it was before.

She happily payed the old women for her new coat and took it with her to brave that cold winded summer day. The life had been breathed not only into the store but the whole town and suddenly the girl remembered the beauty of each palm tree and a cloudless sky.





The Pea Coat

by Tim Tipton

Arranging the lost closet of clothes
you will no longer wear.
I come to find that old pea coat of yours.
The one you wore all the time like a suit of armor.
I took the coat to my nose.
This gesture endeared me to you absolutely.
In this visual world,
this modern landscape of polyester,
cotton, nylon, and pigment,
it is the smell inside this damn coat
that almost holds what's left of you.

Inspired by Thrift, by Paula Odor, 1999, watercolor, 34" x 28"

Second Place: Adult Poetry



Arrived at My Door Llegaste a mi puerta

by Carmen Mogg

Arrived at my door
covered with sand
in the open hand
an empty cup.

I gave the pilgrim
welcome and light
thirst was quenched
with wine of life.

There's no more sand
on garment or skin
thirst is no more
in body or soul.

New journey
begins now
open roads
full of life.

por Carmen Mogg

Llegaste a mi puerta
cubierto de arena
en tu mano abierta
vi copa vacía.

Di al peregrino
luz y acogida
la sed apagada
con vino de vida.

Ya no hay arena
ni en piel ni ropa
sed ya no existe
en alma ni boca.

Empieza ahora
nueva jornada
caminos abiertos
llenos de vida.

Inspired by Ortega Adobe, by Marguerite Hardeman, c. 1960s, oil on canvas, 31" x 37"

Tranquility

by Tara Kay Acosta

Since conception
I became
part of ocean crests.
Where liquid and foam
collide then waltz.
A well dressed sunbeam
nuzzled me when I reclined
in a stranger's womb.

As a child, I molded
my footprints in the sand;
Played my palms against
prickly palm trees.

Ignored, forgotten
sidewalks,
dazzling street lights
that whisper
Hello

The stars do not share
my atmosphere.
Only by the sea -
once or twice
has a brave,
unurban light
come out of tranquility
To tango for me.



Katherine McGuire

Inspired by Catalina Street V, by Katherine McGuire, 2002, watercolor on paper, 22" x 28"

Shadows of Oranges

by Carole Avila

Wisps of S-shaped smoke rose up from the engine. My bumper penetrated the stucco of someone's home. Oil splattered across the windshield, black inkblots without symmetry. Viscous fluid crawled downward, too lazy to drip in a steady stream. Maybe too traumatized to move.

A slender tree, defenseless against the impact, fell forward over the hood. Her oranges hung from weeping branches, and wooden limbs bent at an odd angle, like my leg. My head drooped over my shoulder.

Juicy pulp bled from crushed victims. I inhaled the sour odor of citrus and gasoline. The tang of burnt rinds in my nostrils didn't smell like the citrus shampoo I used on my baby boy's golden hair. Far away sirens lost any sense of urgency, and the oranges hung without fear of falling off branches, as if the stillness could hold them.

The paramedic asked my name, but I couldn't answer. He shouted, "Breathe!" but I didn't like what I saw and closed my eyes. The next time they opened I lay in a hospital bed and my leg dangled in a sling strung up to a metal pole. My arms and hands hurt, as if I still clung to the steering wheel, a useless life preserver.

A midnight vista in the window reflected the headboard and smooth plastic edges of the bed with an automated blow-up mattress. Monitors winked at me, as if they had a secret. Two vases of flowers, one full and one anemic, sat on a rolling tray.

A basket held fruit—oranges—and their brilliant color washed out any of the other treats. The fluorescent fixture cast a shadow on the pitted



Meredith Brooks-Abbott

skins. Orange waxing moons. Slivers of smiles, like my son's just before he fell asleep in his car seat.

Weeks passed before the hospital released me with a stack of papers on my lap and a metallic heart-shaped balloon attached to a long curl ribbon tied to the wheelchair. A nurse pushed the chair and me and the balloon down the long cold aisle to the hospital lobby. People pretended not to stare. Their eyes felt sorry for my scars peeking out the bandages, but the plastic bracelet on my wrist reminded me of who I was.

My parents picked me up in their battered sedan. Mom apologized because there was only one route back to my apartment. For just a second my heart gave out like it did that orange day as their car neared the stucco house. Someone had wrapped a sturdy mesh screen around the tree where my bumper embraced it like a crushing bear hug.

I asked my dad to stop and pick the one remaining fruit, and at home my mom peeled and sliced it. The first bite squirted stinging nectar into my eyes, and it tasted sweet. Blood oranges. It smelled like gasoline.

Dad said to call if I needed anything. Mom would stay for a couple of weeks. She had already packed up the nursery.

Inspired by Oranges Against Shadows, by Meredith Brooks Abbott, 1999, oil on canvas, 21" x 25"

Secondhand

by Toni Guy

Mrs. Preciado shuffled down the men's aisle, fingering the rows of donated clothes like pages of a dusty biography until her hand settled on the collar of a starched blue work shirt. She pressed her palm against it, separating it from its neighbors and caressed the mother of pearl buttons running down the front. Then she lifted its sleeve and ran it along the sharp curve of her withered cheek.

Across the aisle, a woman shot her a questioning glance. She let the sleeve fall.

A pair of scuffed leather derbies lay sprawled on the floor on the next aisle. She bent over, her knees quivered, threatening to collapse beneath her. She cradled the shoes in her gnarled hands and ran the edge of her faded red cardigan over the toes, buffing off the dust worked deep into the cracks.

She found a home for them on the shelf between a pair of tattered Doc Martins and scuffed golf shoes. Side by side, their brown skins touched. She knotted the derbies' spaghetti-thin laces together. Now, they would never be separated.

Wool, corduroy, linen, and polyester suits lined the far wall. A catalog of men's lives linked together on a long metal rack. Mrs. Preciado stroked their backs as if consoling them. She unhooked one – a silk tuxedo, its edges frayed. Black threads unraveled from the worn cufflink holes. She fussed over the imperfections, tore them off with her teeth and collected them in her pocket. She buried her face in the jacket and inhaled. His musky scent lingered even though the wearer had long since danced his last waltz, raised his last glass, taken his last breath.

"Are you going to buy that?"

She opened her eyes. "Excuse me?"

A young man with slick blue hair and a hint of a tattoo poking out of his t-shirt stood in front of her. "If you're not, can I see it?"

She held the jacket out to him, her mouth dry.

He slipped it on, tugged at the sleeves. "What do you think?"

The buttons strained in their holes and the sleeves didn't reach his palms. He was too broad, too long. Everything was wrong.

He seemed to sense her hesitation. "There's someone special. Do you think this will impress him? He's into the whole 1950's vibe."

The light in his eyes spoke of first dances, shared popcorn, and long goodnights.

She reached up and straightened his lapels. Her fingers remembered the gesture and trembled. "It's meant for you."

"You think?" He flashed her a lopsided grin. "Then it's settled." He shrugged off the jacket and flipped it over his arm. "Wish me luck."

She watched as the cashier folded the purchase and tucked it into a crumpled grocery bag. Her eyes followed the bag until it disappeared with the young man out the front door.

Deep in her pocket her fingers found the torn threads. She clutched them in her palm and told herself they were enough.



Paula Odor

House of Dreams

BY Mona Alvarado Frazier

Maria Conception awakened with a sharp intake of breath. Why did the man try to grasp her hand in her dream? He was a shadow, but his presence familiar.

The sun burned hot through the muslin curtains covering the window. She pulled her damp nightdress away from her chest and rose slowly, allowing her arthritic knees time to acclimate to movement. The clatter of pots, a knife chopping against a heavy board, and the kettle whistling sounded through the room. Her legs moved slowly, shuffling towards the nightstand and the pitcher of water. After a rinse of cool water on her face, she stroked wet palms over her silver hair, twisted a rope of hair to the nape of her neck.

"Buenas días, Doña Maria," her daughter-in-law said. She wiped her hands on a faded blue apron before she took an earthenware cup from the cupboard. "The coffee is ready."

"Maybe today," Maria Conception said noticing lines of worry across her daughter-in-law's forehead. She sat heavily on the wood chair, its seat smoothed from decades of use.

Both women cast glances towards the kitchen window, searching the sky for answers, wondering if bad weather approached or the bloated clouds were passing through.

Woven baskets of chiles sat next to the charcoal brazier, ready for roasting. "Canning day," her daughter-in-law reminded Maria Conception. Soon, the familiar scent of burning coal and the sting of chile vapor rose filling the three-room home before escaping through open windows.

Maria Conception instructed her daughter-in-law on the correct way to make chile sauce and the virtues of canning. She needed to know the Ortega



family's history so she could provide for an unstable future when it arose.

Their adobe given to them in a land grant stood on Chumash land, spanning the years between Mexican territory and California statehood. Emigdio, Maria Conception's husband, built the adobe house. She remembered the day Emigdio returned with his horse sweaty from pulling the carreta filled with redwood beams he found in an abandoned adobe in Rancho Sespe. Their river rock foundation would now have an equally sturdy roof. "A good home," she said.

They raised thirteen children who worked their fields, tended the goats and provided for their needs. Their adobe withstood the flood of 1867 and the fire which burned their rafters of giant reed cane tied with rawhide, the odor lingering for months. The rugged beams survived, slightly scorched. "A miracle," Maria Conception said.

Minutes passed to hours as the chile was roasted, peeled, and plucked clean of seeds. Unspoken anxiety stretched in the space between the two women. Maria Conception rocked in the oak chair her son carved the spring before last. The rhythm, a comforting pulse, creaked to a stop. A knock on the door boomed and paused, followed by rapid taps. Maria Conception saw Mr. Sanchez through the window, his hat in his hand and knew what her dream meant.

Inspired by Ortega Adobe, by Marguerite Hardeman, c. 1960s, oil on canvas, 31" x 37"

The following four artists' work were the inspiration for this year's Art Tales. Currently on loan to the E.P. Foster Library, they are part of the City of Ventura's Municipal Art Collection normally on display at Ventura City Hall.



Meredith Brooks Abbott (b. 1938)

Oranges Against Shadows, 1999, oil on canvas

Meredith Brooks Abbott continues the American Impressionist legacy through her luminous paintings of California landscapes and still life. She studied and learned from several recognized American Impressionist painters – Douglass Parshall, Richard Meryman and Clarence Hinkle. Abbott's family-owned, fifty-acre ranch in Carpinteria is the landscape found in her plein air paintings. With an affinity for nature, Abbott is active in the preservation of threatened environments in California. She is a member of the Open Airing Klub (OAK), a group of painters whose subjects are endangered areas threatened by development. Abbott is also a member of numerous arts associations including the Santa Barbara Arts Council, Plein Air Painters of America, and the California Art Club.



Marguerite Hardeman (1911-1990)

Ortega Adobe, c. 1960's, *oil on canvas*

California muralist Marguerite Hardeman — a member of the Realistic Painters Group in Ojai who taught at Ventura College in the 1960s — created 25 murals, 15 of which are now in the Olivas Adobe art collection. They depict four centuries of Ventura's history from the first encounter between Chumash and European explorers to scenes of Spanish and Mexican settlement — including the Mission and Mexican Rancho San Miguel of the Olivas family — and capped with a modern-day overview of the city from Grant Park. The murals are on display each year free for the public to view during the "Murals & Roses" exhibit at the Olivas Adobe in May or early June. In celebration of the City of Ventura's 150th anniversary of the State of California granting Ventura cityhood, a panel of her work "Ortega Adobe" is included in the 2016 Art Tales contest.



Katherine McGuire (b. 1958)

Catalina Street V, 2002, *watercolor on paper*

Katherine McGuire has established herself as a highly respected watercolorist with a sensitive eye for the local landscape. Enchanted with images of quintessential Ventura, particularly the diverse people and characteristic architecture of ordinary neighborhoods, her subtle and airy treatment of vintage buildings and idyllic vistas portray Ventura as a place of dreamy charm. "I love the hillsides, the ocean, the Spanish architecture. I think I notice details in Ventura that are often overlooked because it's so different from where I grew up — there are no palm trees in Iowa."

Katherine McGuire, who has been fascinated with art since childhood, earned a BA in fine arts from the University of New Mexico. She is a member of the Buenaventura Art Association and former co-chair of the Historic Committee for the Midtown Ventura Community Council. Her art has been exhibited at the Carnegie Art Museum, the Museum of Ventura County, and, among other spaces, the Ojai Center for the Arts.



Paula Odor (b. 1927)

Thrift, 1999, *watercolor*

This highly evocative work describes a multi-layered perspective of human experience in visual terms, but for Paula Odor the impulse for creativity is primarily instinctive. While painting in the park near downtown Ventura's historic Mission, Odor took a break and walked passed one of the colorful thrift stores in the area. The vision of light on a windowpane, and the rich tapestry of objects within reacted with her sense of aesthetic pleasure. She says "I try to make a painting so that a person sees something for the first time. We look at things every day and yet we never really see them."

Paula Odor is a watercolor painter who has been a resident of Ventura since 1955. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Ad Design, and a Master's in Art from New Mexico Highlands University, and has taught art in public schools. She has exhibited her work widely in galleries and museums such as the Carnegie Art Museum, and the Buenaventura Art Association. She is active with several art organizations such as the California Goldcoast Watercolor Society and the Ventura College Friends of the Arts.

Public Art Project Manager Tobie Roach

As curator of this year's Art Tales display at the E.P. Foster Library, I say "thank you" to the 123 writers, aged 5 to 80 and beyond, who took up the challenge of composing poems or short fiction inspired by the four artworks I selected from the Municipal Art Collection for the library this year.

I am also very grateful to the many teachers who support creative writing in our city by encouraging their students to enter the contest.

"Our Local Story" is the Art Tales theme for 2016, celebrating Ventura's 150th birthday in April through four artists whose works in the Municipal and Public Art Collections tell our city's unique story by depicting its classic neighborhoods, citrus orchards, proud history and hip downtown."

– Tobie Roach, Art Tales Curator



Historically
STORIED

About the 2016 Art Tales Contest

The contest "open to writers everywhere" attracted youth, high school and adult writers who submitted a record 123 works of short fiction and poems inspired by City of Ventura Municipal Art Collection works of art on loan at the library and created by artists Marguerite Hardeman, Paula Odor, Meredith Brooks Abbott and Katherine McGuire. The artworks selected celebrated "our local story" to mark the city's sesquicentennial.

Contestants ranged in age from kindergarten to over 80 with most entries from Ventura County: 33 by adults (18 years and up), 30 by teens (13-17) and 60 by youths 12 years or under.

We thank the many teachers from the Ventura Unified School District who encouraged their students to enter or taught the "Art Tales" lesson plan in their classroom.

We are grateful to the five contest judges for 2016:

- Ventura County Poet Laureate Phil Taggart
- Ventura County Librarian Deya Terrafranca
- Ventura Public Art Chair Claudia Pardo
- Ventura Library Advisory Commissioner Dolly Moehrle, and
- Community Partnerships Manager Denise Sindelar.

The judges received all entries identified only by (1) a number, (2) the artwork that inspired it, (3) the prose or poetry category and (4) the age group of the writer.

We thank all participants for sending in such beautiful poems or stories. It is amazing to read the many ways the artworks in our Municipal Art Collection inspire more creativity than anyone could imagine.

The City of Ventura

Municipal *Art* Collection

In May of 1999, the City Council established the Municipal Art Acquisition Program to document the history of visual art in Ventura through the annual purchase of important works of art created by area artists. The collection provides increased access to art of the highest quality and of distinctive merit through its display in the public areas of City Hall and other municipal buildings. Featured artworks must be created by artists residing in Ventura County or who have made a direct contribution to the history of art in Ventura County.

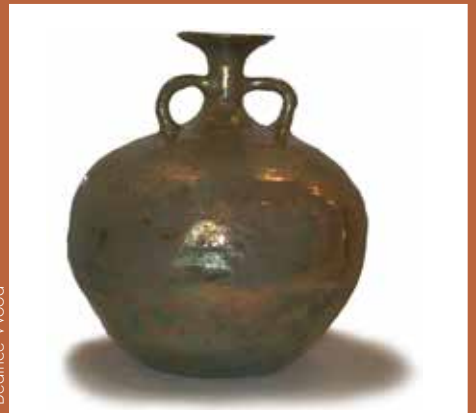
The Municipal Art Acquisition Committee, a sub-committee of the Public Art Commission, oversees the purchase of works in a variety of artistic media. The Public Art Commission plans to expand the collection in future years.

Ventura's Municipal Art Collection is exhibited in City Hall, 501 Poli Street, in the downtown Cultural District during regular business hours, closed alternate Fridays.

For more information visit
www.cityofventura.net/publicart or call 805/658-4793.



Christine Brennan



Bedrice Wood



John Nichols



dm Spaulding



Norman Kirk

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or by contacting the California Relay Service.

